

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

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RECLAIM THE RECORDS and ALEC)
FERRETTI,)
Plaintiffs,) No. _____
-against-) COMPLAINT
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF)
STATE,)
Defendant.)
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Plaintiffs Reclaim the Records and Alec Ferretti, by their attorney David B. Rankin of Beldock, Levine & Hoffman, LLP for their complaint, do hereby state and allege:

Preliminary Statement

1. This is an action under the Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”), 5 U.S.C. §§552 *et seq.*, seeking the production of agency records improperly withheld by Defendant United States Department of State (“DOS” or “Defendant”), in response to a request properly made by Plaintiffs.
2. Plaintiffs seek an injunction requiring Defendant to release the requested records.

Jurisdiction and Venue

3. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction of the FOIA claim and personal jurisdiction over the parties pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(b). This Court also has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331.

4. Venue is proper as the records exist on databases within this district and Plaintiff Ferretti is a resident of New York.

5. The DOS has failed to respond to Plaintiffs’ request within the time allowed by FOIA. Plaintiffs have exhausted all administrative remedies pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(C)(i).

Parties

6. Plaintiff Alec Ferretti is a board member of Plaintiff Reclaim the Records (“Reclaim”), a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that acquires genealogical and archival data sets and images from government sources for the purpose of making such genealogical data free and accessible to the public at large. Collectively, Mr. Ferretti and Reclaim the Records are referred to as the “Plaintiffs.”

7. Defendant DOS is an agency within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. §§ 551(1) & 552(f)(1).

Factual Background

8. On May 1, 2019, Plaintiff Ferretti submitted a FOIA request (Control Number F-2019-09405) to the DOS via mail (hereinafter the “Request”). The Request is attached hereto as Exhibit (“Ex.”) A.

9. The Request seeks “a copy, in its entirety, of the index to deaths of Consular Reports of Deaths of a U.S. Citizen Abroad from 1975 – 2018 inclusive.” Ex. A.

10. On February 21, 2020, DOS responded to the Request. DOS’s response incorrectly dated the Request as having been submitted on September 5, 2019 and stated they would not be able to respond to the request within 20 days due to “unusual circumstances,” including “the need to search for and collect requested records from other Department offices or Foreign Service posts.” The DOS’s February 21, 2020 response is attached hereto as Ex. B.

11. To date, DOS has neither denied the Request nor produced the requested records.

Cause of Action

12. Defendant failed to respond to or produce the records requested by Plaintiffs within twenty business days of receiving the request as required by the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(A)(i)

13. Defendant continues to improperly deny Plaintiffs access to the requested records.

14. Defendant's failure to promptly make available the records sought by Plaintiffs' Request violates the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. §§ 552(a)(2)-(3) and 552(a)(6)(A)(i), and Defendant's corresponding regulations.

Request for Relief

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs respectfully request that this Court:

- A. Order Defendant to conduct a thorough search for all records responsive to Plaintiffs' Request and demonstrate that it employed search methods reasonably calculated to uncover all records responsive to Plaintiffs' Request;
- B. Issue a declaration that Plaintiffs are entitled to disclosure of the records responsive to Plaintiffs' Request;
- C. Order Defendant to disclose all non-exempt records responsive to Plaintiffs' Request in its entirety, as well as all non-exempt portions of responsive records;
- D. Order Defendant to promptly provide an index pursuant to *Vaughn v. Rosen*, 484 F.2d 820 (D.C. Cir. 1973), and its progeny, inventorying all responsive records and itemizing and justifying all withholdings of responsive documents;
- E. Enjoin Defendant from continuing to withhold any and all non-exempt records or portions thereof responsive to Plaintiffs' Request;
- F. Immediately process all records responsive to the Request;
- G. Award Plaintiffs reasonable attorneys' fees and costs pursuant to incurred in this action; and 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(E);
- H. Grant such other relief as the Court may deem just and proper

Dated: February 23, 2023
New York, New York

Respectfully submitted,

By: 

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